

Factors Contributing towards the Sustainability of Youth Organizations as Partners in Community Development

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian kualitatif ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada kemampuan persatuan belia untuk bertahan sebagai rakan pembangunan masyarakat. Tiga kaedah telah digunakan untuk mendapatkan maklumat iaitu wawancara, pemerhatian dan penganalisan dokumen. Kajian telah dijalankan di Kampung Endah di daerah Kuala Langat Selangor. Persatuan ini telah dipilih kerana prestasi cemerlang yang telah ditunjukkan oleh ahli-ahlinya yang begitu aktif. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa ada 14 faktor yang menentukan kemampuan sesebuah persatuan belia untuk memberikan sumbangan kepada pembangunan masyarakat secara berterusan. Faktor-faktor tersebut merangkumi pentadbiran, kepimpinan, wawasan, perancangan, pembahagian tugas, pengalaman, peruntukan kewangan, ekonomi, sokongan masyarakat, kerohanian, pengawasan, hubungan dengan agensi, sumbangan masyarakat dan semangat kesukarelawanan.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative study is to identify factors that contribute towards the sustainability of youth organization as partner in community development. Three major tools were used to secure information: interview, observation and document analysis. The study was conducted at Kampung Endah in the District of Kuala Langat, Selangor. The study revealed 14 factors that contribute to the sustainability of a youth organization as partner in community development. They were administration, leadership, vision, planning, division of task, experience, funding, economic development, people's support, spiritual development, monitoring, linkage with agencies, contribution from community and volunteerism.

INTRODUCTION

Youth forms the major portion of Malaysia's population. The number is expected to reach 9.3 million by the year 2000 (the Sixth Malaysia Plan). Realising the importance of youth as partner in nation building, the government is making all efforts to unleash this invaluable potential.

The Malaysian approach to youth development calls for all development agencies to work together. These agencies are given the roles of providing a conducive educational climate and environment for the young people to learn and participate; and to be creative and innovative through constant interaction and guidance. To date, more than 30 government and non-government agencies have been involved in moulding the young population to become useful citizens today and in the future (Shamsuddin 1990). The succeeding paragraphs in this section describe spe-

cifically the major strategies adopted and implemented by the government through these development agencies.

Youth Development Programmes

Numerous programmes have been organized to prepare youths to be partners in nation building. These programmes can be categorised under four major groups – viz, Economic, Social, Educational and Spiritual. The economic programmes encompass such projects as the Agricultural Youth Project, Youth in Business, Youth Cooperatives, the Youth Land Scheme, the Entrepreneurship Programme, and Vocational Training. After participating in these economic programmes, it is hoped that the youth will be better prepared to face the future as self-reliant individuals.

The social programmes include such activities as work camps, awareness campaigns, community

work, self-help programmes and cooperation for development programmes. These programmes are formulated in such a manner as to instill the spirit of volunteerism and community mindedness among the young people. The educational programmes for the youth focus on improving performance in academic studies coupled with preparing them for working life. Activities normally conducted under these programmes are: tuition classes, career guidance, resource centers projects, campaigns and motivational talks.

The general aim of incorporating the spiritual programme as an integral element in youth development is to create awareness and strong understanding among the young people of the various aspects of religion to enable them to arrive at the code of ethics of how to communicate with the Creator, how to socialise with fellow humans and how to treat and preserve the environment. It is envisaged that these programmes will lead youth to truly practise religion. Examples of activities under this programme include cadre development, religious work camps, small group discussions, outreach programmes to the community, going-back-to-basic programmes, and visits.

Youth Policy

The concern to have a well-rounded generation to spearhead the country's progress toward excellence has motivated the government to formulate a philosophy for youth development. The National Youth Policy (NYP) was adopted by the cabinet in 1985 as the philosophy which would provide the guidelines for youth development. In addition a Master Programme for Youth Development was launched in May 1991 to implement the NYP.

The NYP elaborated the need for all youth programmes to incorporate six major principles. The six principles are:

1. Putting into practice the National Tenets
2. Basing activities on the spirit of volunteerism, autonomy and integration
3. Developing matured leadership qualities
4. Encouraging involvement in decision making
5. Developing high morale and striving for excellence
6. Providing wide and indepth knowledge [National Youth Policy, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 1991]

The activities under this programme call for mass-participation. This is obvious even from the title of the programmes delineated. The activities are grouped under ten major themes:

1. Active Malaysia - A programme which emphasizes sports activities and physical recreation to build a healthy and active society through regular exercise and active participation. It also aims at increasing stamina and endurance to achieve higher productivity and better quality of life.
2. Excellent Malaysia - A programme to attain top performance in sports development; to produce champions in all fields for the nation - outstanding sportsmen to whom excellence is a cherished value and who will acquire a, positive, independent, indomitable spirit and high aspirations.
3. Patriotic Malaysia - A programme to foster a spirit of awareness, loyalty, sacrifice and love for the country; to build a brave national character with a strong fighting spirit and the ability to resist negative influences; and to nurture positive values.
4. Harmonious Malaysia - A programme geared towards attaining a happy life; to achieve national solidarity by building a society imbued with mutual understanding and respect, a sense of responsibility and patriotism.
5. Skilled Malaysia - A programme to produce a young generation skilled in various fields in line with national development objectives of meeting manpower needs in the economic, industrial, agriculture and service sectors. The programme is also aimed at building a progressive young generation.
6. Ethical Malaysia - A programme towards building a harmoniously balanced young generation - intellectually, spiritually and physically - in line with the national education philosophy which emphasizes noble qualities, honesty, trustworthiness, administrable traits, good character and kindness, sincerity, humane attitude, positive thinking, and love of nation, country and creed.
7. Progressive Malaysia - A programme to build an innovative, creative society with an open attitude to all forms of modernisation and development, physical or mental, in line with the objective of making Malaysia a developed nation.

8. Universal Malaysia - A programme to nurture a sense of pride in the nation and love of country and creed, and to enhance Malaysia's image in the international community through cooperative relations with other nations for mutual progress and well-being.
9. Caring Malaysia - A programme to build a generation of Malaysians who are conscious of the need to help the less fortunate and victims of disasters, and who are humane, responsible, caring and imbued with the spirit of togetherness.
10. Cultured Malaysia - A programme towards a Malaysian society that will practise national unity and enhance the quality of life, while preserving positive cultural values in line with the philosophy of the National Culture Policy. (Program Induk Belia Negara, 1991).

The development of youth, both physically and spiritually and in accordance with an acceptable philosophy, is critical in preparing the young citizens to realise the vision of the present leaders. The above policy and master plan can contribute towards fulfilling these hopes.

Youth Movement

The development of a secured youth movement is accepted as pertinent in the country's effort to mould the youth as nation builders. Each of the youth organizations in Malaysia has its branches/chapters at every administrative level of the country. The basic hierarchical structure is pyramidal in nature with a wide base at the village level and tapers upwards at the district, state and finally the national level. The numerous youth organizations in the country are commonly grouped under four major categories :

Uniform Associations; Religious Associations; Ordinary Associations; and Student Organizations.

Practically, all the youth organizations in Malaysia are affiliated with the Malaysian Youth Council (MYC). The MYC was established in 1948 to perform the role of a co-ordinating body for all the youth organizations. The government has recognised MYC as the National Committee of youth; thus there is an on-going consultation and provision of assistance on matters concerning the young. The main objectives of MYC are:

1. To uphold and strengthen the voluntary principles in youth movement
2. To make recommendations to the government, statutory bodies or to other appropriate bodies on matters affecting youth
3. To establish and maintain relations with other national and international youth councils and organizations
4. To promote international respect, inter-communal understanding, cooperation and harmony through youth work
5. To promote and encourage interest in the moral, educational and physical welfare of Malaysian youth among interested bodies
6. To work in close cooperation with agencies responsible for youth affairs in the interest of youth movements.
7. To work toward establishing and strengthening a Malaysian Youth Policy with related government agencies.
(Pertubuhan-pertubuhan Belia di Malaysia 1985)

The sincere concern of the government to accommodate the contribution of youth movements toward nation building prompted the formation of a youth parliament called National Youth Consultative Council. As stated in its constitution, the council is given the mandate to carry out the following functions:

1. To deliberate on the problems of youth and act as adviser to the Minister on the formulation and review of youth programmes,
2. To act as a consultative and advisory body for all national youth organizations in Malaysia,
3. To co-ordinate programmes and activities of youth organizations in Malaysia,
4. To channel youth enthusiasm and energy for national development,
5. To work towards instilling loyalty to the nation and creating a sense of national identity among the youth. (Pertubuhan-pertubuhan Belia di Malaysia 1985)

The following paragraphs provide a detailed picture of a youth organization that has benefitted from the efforts of various bodies in promoting youth development. The observation was made with the objective of revealing the "what, how, and who" are associated with the success story of a

youth organization as a partner in community development.

Kg. Endah Youth Organization

The Youth Organization of Kg. Endah is located in a traditional village, approximately 20 km from Banting town (78 km from the city of Kuala Lumpur) in the district of Kuala Langat, Selangor Darul Ehsan. The village has a total population of 1982 people where 918 are females and 864 males. Almost all the residents are descendants of Javanese and farming is their main occupation.

Kg. Endah Youth Organization was formed 29 years ago on the 17th of November 1964. Initially, the establishment of the association was a combined effort with a neighbouring village. In 1970 they split and Kg. Endah Youth formed a new organization.

Subsequently, in 1972, Kg. Endah Youth Organization was revived and became a chapter of one of the National Youth Movements (4B). It started with only 120 members. Following several membership campaigns in 1972 and 1973, the number of members increased to 250 Youth.

In 1976, there was a shift in the top leadership of the association. However, in 1977 the former leaders came back to lead the organization until 1987. Since then, the organization has been able to maintain a commendable performance. Currently it has 388 members with 274 males and 114 females.

The organization, spearheaded by dedicated leaders, has received several national awards for excellence. After 1987 the state and national panel of judges for the Top Association Award requested Kg. Endah Youth organisation to refrain from further participation in the award competition.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Three major tools were employed to gather the data needed for the case study. The tools were a semi-structured interview, observation and document analyses.

The semi-structured interview revealed rich data (through the use of systematic probing procedures). The interview focused on gathering information on the involvement of youth in sus-

taining the viability of the youth organization. The respondents interviewed were ten selected youth leaders, five ordinary members of the organisation, ten village leaders and five local residents, five officers from the Department of Youth and Sports, and five officials from related development agencies. The duration for each interview was between one to two hours. All interviews were tape-recorded and the information was later transcribed and qualitatively analyzed with the use of the Textual Data Categorization (TDC).

The field observation was useful in gathering facts about the activities of the youth organization – with special focus on the Group Farming Project. It enriched the information obtained through both the interview and document analysis methods. For the third tool, selected documents in the possession of the youth organization, the Village Development committee and the Department of Youth and Sport were compiled and analysed. The document analyses were found to be critical in arriving at the details about the organization and its activities.

The whole data gathering process took 60 days to accomplish. It was completed during the first week of June 1993. An enumerator was trained to do the interview and field observation during which he stayed in the village for two weeks.

Data Analysis

The first step in the data analysis was to immediately transcribe the notes taken during the interview. The second step was to identify the keywords related to the major questions asked during the interview. These keywords were then organized into three main categories: successful activities, impact and organizational strength. Under each category, further sub-categories were developed.

FINDINGS

Factors Contributing Towards the Success of Kg. Endah Youth Organization's Activities and as Partner in Community Development.

The Kg. Endah Youth Organization was successful in carrying out its activities to bring about desired changes to its members and the community at large. The main factors associated with this achievement were as follows:

Reliable administration coupled with availability of supportive infrastructure

The organization has a reliable administrative structure. Being different from many other village organizations, it has its own 'operational' club house to serve as a centre for administration and documentation. The set-up of the club house facilitates the work of recording and presenting the village data for the perusal of its members and the community.

Proactive Leadership Orientation

The leaders of the organization have spearheaded the organization as a non-formal training institution that exposes members and villagers to unleash their leadership potential. Through this activity, the organization and the village community have strong support from leaders and members—thus ensuring continuity in realising their set goals.

Clear Direction and Vision

The organization and all its bureaus are clear about their goals and mission. The mission is based on the philosophy that encourages autonomy and self-esteem. Each bureau considers both the development of members and community at large towards attaining sustainable development and complying with the vision of leaders at the national level as the goals and mission.

Planning to Serve and Improve

All the activities to be implemented are developed to serve the needs of the members and the community. The planning process takes into consideration the involvement of the clients to be developed. In this manner the activities of the organization always receive full support from the youth as well as the adults.

Division of Tasks and Focus

To enhance the activities of the organization, eight bureaus are established. All the bureaus are dedicated to accomplishing the objective of the activities agreed upon. This outfit facilitates the management system and helps to reduce unnecessary burden on certain individuals or sub-committees.

Experiences that are Kept Alive

The members have been exposed to many courses and training schemes within the country and overseas. The experiences have been shared with the rest of the members and readily modified and applied wherever possible. Subsequently, since many of the youth leaders are members of the major village level committees, the invaluable experiences are tapped by the village leaders.

Stable Financial Support

This organization has a stable financial situation. It has its own economic projects thus continuously contributing towards stabilising the funds needed for development and implementation of activities. In addition, the prominent villagers also provide funding to support the organization's activities.

Concern on Economic Development

Most of the projects/activities are carried out commercially. These projects include group vegetable farming, animal husbandry, business and cottage industry. The organization also helps members to ascertain sites, licence, capital and attend relevant training courses. To date, no members are unemployed. They have on an average monthly income of RM500.00

Activities that Attract People Support

The members and villagers have full faith in the sincerity of the organization's intentions. Thus, they participate actively in the activities of the organization. This is obvious when the organization embarks on activities that benefit the members and villagers. The organization has gained the respect of both groups.

Based on Spiritual Development

The organization has capitalised on spiritual development to reduce the problems of the generation gap by creating an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. All the religious activities call for joint planning and participation of both young and old. The interfacing on religion matters facilitates the implementation of the socio-economic activities.

Continuous Monitoring of Activities

The progress of the activities is constantly monitored by the committee members of the organization. Through this system any flaw that arises from the activities can be readily remedied.

Linkage with Development Agencies

The leaders of the organization have been effective in playing the role of resource linkers. They have linked the members/activities to the related development agencies for guidance and support. The organization, in general, welcomes any form of help from government or non-government agencies.

Contribution Beyond Organization

The respect the villagers have earned opens the door for the organization to contribute directly to the development of the community. They are invited to become decision makers in most of the major grass-root institutions existing in the village. When the leadership of the youth organization is accepted by the people, its activities will have the benefit of both moral and material support from the normal village development efforts and funding.

Volunteerism in Practice

The spirit of volunteerism is accepted and put into practice throughout the organization. Without doubt, this is the foundation for the eight bureaux to be more active in pursuing their projects.

CONCLUSIONS

The formation of a youth organization in Kg. Endah, in one way or another, has contributed towards the village living up to its name (Endah means 'beautiful' in all aspects). The mention of Kg. Endah will ring a bell to Malaysians as the most developed village, the most well-decorated village, the village with no or negligible unemployment and drug problems, the village with an organised youth, the village with political harmony—in other words, a model village. Presently it is a common sight for villagers to see both national and international visitors taking photographs or making some specific observation. This phenomenon is the result of having young citizens (the bulk of the residents) who are re-

sponsible, organised and having the spirit of volunteerism and community mindedness.

Specifically, the impact of the Kg. Endah Youth Organization on the well-being of its members and the community at large is as follows:

1. *Impact on the Youth*

- a. The organization is instrumental in uniting all the young people in the village.
- b. Through the dynamic activities of the organization, the youth is realising its self-worth and becoming more conscious of its identity.
- c. The organization provides the avenues for the young villagers to share their talents. Through this process they are able to contribute and enhance the development of the village and its residents.
- d. As a result of being organized, the problems of unemployment and drugs are dealt with in a concerted manner. At the moment, such problems are almost non-existent.
- e. The spirit of volunteerism among the young is returning. The organization should be given the credit for the revival because they have endorsed service as the main stay of their activities.
- f. The youth leaders, through the various activities, have instilled the realisation among the young people that many benefits can be derived from being members of the youth organisation. This is not so in other places and where young people are deterred from becoming members. The youth of Kg. Endah accept that a strong organization is an asset to the village.

2. *Impact on the Village Community*

- a. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect between the old and the young of the village. The youth organization has bridged the gap between them.
- b. The village traditions and heritage are revived through the activities of the organization.
- c. The strict tradition that the young must listen to the old has been broken. The success of the organization has opened the door for elders in the village to seek the

opinions of the youth leaders in practically all matters.

- d. The organization has played a major role in making Kg. Endah a model village. As a result there is a stronger sense of belonging and village mindedness among the residents.

The impact is also felt by the Malaysians in general. Kg. Endah is recognised as a social laboratory for youth bodies or any village development committee seeking ideas for improvement. In summary, below is listed the strength of the Kg. Endah Youth Organization with special focus on aspects of a youth movement, economic activities and community service.

1. Dedicated, matured and knowledgeable leaders;
2. Functional bureaux;
3. Clear and specific objectives at both the organization and bureau levels;
4. Strong support from the members in all the activities of the organization;
5. Availability of second-line leaders;
6. Blessed by both young and old residents;
7. The activities formulated take into consideration the various age groups of the members – everybody feels satisfied;
8. Operation room with up-to-date data;
9. Constant monitoring of activities;
10. Productive linkage with development agencies;
11. Stable financial standing;
12. Planned activities with few *ad hoc* programmes;
13. Activities with commercial orientation;
14. Responsive to the opportunities created by the government in economic development;
15. Agent of community development;
16. A strong voice in village decision making process;
17. Special provision to involvement of adults in youth activities;
18. Organization of religious activities (normally the domain of older residents) – thus bridging the generation gap; and,
19. All-round activities with the intention of producing a balanced outlook among youth.

The weaknesses of Kg. Endah Youth Organization were not noticeable. However, on closer scrutiny, these weaknesses were mostly related to secretarial/office management practice. The fil-

ing system is not systematic; the minutes of meetings of the various sub-committees do not follow a standard format; and the club's newsletter does not meet the member needs regularly. Even at the present stage of success, Kg. Endah Youth Organization needs further guidance for sustained betterment.

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